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SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR SEPT 30-OCT 1 VISIT OF U/S JAMES
[UK](#). GLASSMAN TO BOGOTA, COLOMBIA

Summary

[11](#). (U) With U.S. assistance, Colombia finds itself safer, economically stronger, better governed, and more democratic than it has been in decades. Rates of murder, kidnapping, and violence nationwide have fallen sharply. The captures or kills of several leaders of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and rising desertions have weakened Colombia's largest terrorist group. More than 45,000 combatants, mostly former right-wing paramilitaries, have laid down their arms, and many are participating in GOC reintegration programs. FARC desertions hit a record 2480 in 2007, and 1278 have deserted through May 2008. Still, Colombia remains a work in progress. Consolidating recent gains and making further advances on governance, human rights, security, and poverty reduction represent the greatest challenges for the remainder of the Uribe Administration. Our continued commitment to Colombia will help lock in Colombia's democratic security gains, promote regional stability, and contribute to a Colombia that provides security and opportunity to all of its citizens.
End Summary.

Democratic Security

[12](#). (U) The establishment of greater Colombian government territorial control and the demobilization of 32,000 paramilitaries have created the space for civil society and political parties to operate more openly than ever before. The GOC maintains a police presence in all 1099 municipalities for the first time in history. Increased security of roads and highways have allowed for greater freedom of movement of people and commerce. Murders fell from over 29,000 in 2002 to less than 17,000 in 2007, and kidnappings fell from over 2,800 a year to less than 600 during the same period. Local elections in October 2007 reflected the improved security with over 86,000 candidates participating.

[13](#). (SBU) During 2008, FARC leader Manuel Marulanda ("Tirofijo") died, the military killed key FARC Secretariat member Raul Reyes in a daring operation in Ecuador, notorious FARC commander Nelly Avila Moreno ("Karina") deserted, and the military rescued three American hostages, former presidential candidate Ingrid Betancourt, and eleven others. These successes have further demoralized the morale of FARC rank-and-file morale, leading to increased desertions. The

military is focusing its efforts on attacking FARC in Meta, Tolima, and Valle de Cauca departments. Colombian National Police (CNP) say the FARC's urban terrorist capabilities have been weakened, but Colombian security forces remain concerned over FARC efforts to launch attacks in urban areas. The FARC recently destroyed the court house in Cali, Colombia's third largest city. FARC collusion with new narcotrafficking organizations has increased in many areas of the country, especially in Meta and on the Pacific Coast.

GOC Moving Forward with Consolidation

¶4. (U) In 2004, the GOC created the Center for Coordinated and Integrated Action (CCAI), an interagency committee led by Vice-Minister of Defense Sergio Jaramillo and Accion Social Director Luis Alfonso Hoyos, to promote short-term social and economic development in priority areas where Colombian security forces have reestablished security. Still, the presence in post-conflict areas by civilian institutions remains weak or nonexistent. CCAI's creation reflected the GOC's recognition that a purely military response to the FARC and paramilitary threats was insufficient to solve the country's security problems. Instead, GOC officials understood the GOC needed to complement the military effort with programs to establish a permanent police and government presence in newly secured areas. CCAI focuses on the departments of Meta, Choco, Cesar, Magdalena, Antioquia, and Norte de Santander-- which are centers of FARC or other terrorist activity.

¶5. (U) Military and civilian officials agree that CCAI is the mechanism that will allow the GOC to reestablish state presence in conflict and post-conflict zones. Still, more resources and support from across the GOC bureaucracy are needed for successful implementation. CCAI continues to lack sufficient staff and budget authority to fully manage its vast range of responsibilities, and individual ministries resist surrendering control of resources. Key issues such as transitioning responsibility for security from the military to the police, developing a viable legal economy, and extending health and education services can not be managed by the Defense Ministry alone. The Defense Ministry is leading an effort to better integrate civilian agencies into the process.

¶6. (SBU) CCAI's flagship effort--the Consolidation Plan for Macarena (PCIM)--aims to establish permanent GOC control over the FARC's old strongholds in the Macarena region of Meta department. With funding from the U.S. Military Group, construction began on a Fusion Center (CFI)--PCIM's civilian-military headquarters--in early September after a year-long delay due to CCAI organizational issues. The CFI is set for completion by late October, and will provide a secure site for GOC civilian staff. The delay led to backups in staffing the Center, especially from the Prosecutor General's Office (Fiscalia). CFI staff are meant to be the on-the-ground implementers in Meta, but the Center will require more robust support from civilian agencies (legal, judicial and agricultural) if it is to respond to community demands for more civilian services and development in the near term.

FARC Demobilization and Deserters on the Rise

¶7. (SBU) The Ministry of Defense's \$21 million budget for humanitarian aid, rewards, and public outreach continue to promote FARC desertions. FARC desertions hit a record 2480 in 2007, and 1278 have deserted through May 2008. Still, Colombia's constitutional prohibition against granting amnesty or a pardon to individuals alleged to have committed gross human rights abuses complicate GOC efforts to persuade senior FARC commanders to demobilize. On June 13, Uribe announced that the GOC would not extradite FARC members who freed hostages and would facilitate their passage to a third

country. Several senior FARC members have reportedly voiced interest in demobilizing with some of the FARC's hostages if they are assured they would not serve any jail time. French President Nicolas Sarkozy told Uribe in New York on September 22 that France would accept the FARC members who desert with hostages.

18. (U) Sustained, targeted Colombian military pressure--coupled with the demobilization program--have also improved the "quality" of FARC deserters. The deaths of FARC Secretariat members Manuel Marulanda, Ivan Rios, and Raul Reyes in recent months, along with the desertion of FARC 47th Front leader Karina, have hit FARC morale and encouraged further desertions. In September, Karina entered the Justice and Peace Law process as provided for in Decree 1059 which offers FARC deserters similar legal benefits (reduced jail times) to those given to demobilized paramilitaries. MOD officials told us Karina would be charged for seven crimes against humanity.

GOC Revamps Reintegration Programs

19. (U) The High Commissioner for Reintegration Office (ACR) has assisted 37,137 demobilized individuals: 29,776 collective and 7361 individual. Eighty percent of the demobilized were former paramilitaries, and 20% were individual deserters from the FARC, ELN, and other terrorist groups. Still, the ACR is revising its focus to respond to new challenges. ACR lifted its 18-24 month limit on program participation, and has conditioned receipt of benefits on participation in its programs to ensure compliance and provide the guidance demobilized individuals need to reintegrate into society. The ACR is also reviewing criteria for participation to ensure that demobilized "properly graduate" the program instead of being prematurely being

ejected. The ACR is working with the Colombian National Police (CNP) to monitor crimes against--and committed by--demobilized. It is also trying to locate 3,000 individual deserters and 1,864 paramilitaries who did not register in the reintegration program.

110. (SBU) ACR officials told us they have committed \$38 million on reintegration programs since October 2007, and will maintain its "equal treatment" policy for all demobilized groups. In addition, the program will dedicate more resources to psycho-social services, community outreach, education, and employment generation. Demobilized receive approximately \$80-\$213 monthly payments--as well as a monthly transportation stipend of \$42-\$58--as long as they complete 80% of psycho-social programs, 60% of education programs, and 80% of vocational preparation classes.

Anti-FARC Marches Show Progress

111. (U) On February 4, a non-partisan Colombian student group organized marches against kidnapping and the FARC in 148 cities around the world. Over one million marched against the FARC in Bogota, and millions more around the country. While marches against the FARC had occurred before, this was the largest in Colombia's history. The students used the website Facebook to organize the events throughout Colombia and around the world. The march in Bogota drew the support of politicians from across the political spectrum. On July 20, marches again took place throughout Colombia against the FARC. The turnout in Bogota did not compare to the earlier march, but marches took place even in non-urban areas that traditionally supported the FARC, such as Vista Hermosa and La Macarena in Meta Department.

MLK Fellowship Program

¶12. (U) In 2005, the Embassy launched the Martin Luther King (MLK) English Language Fellows Program with a view to expanding access of disadvantaged minority youth, such as Afro-Colombians and indigenous, to academic and economic opportunities. The MLK Fellows Program started in Bogota as a pilot project and subsequently expanded to the cities of Cali, Medellin and Quibdo. In its two years of existence, the program has developed the English language and leadership skills of 87 minority students selected for their leadership potential and interest in admissions to post-graduate studying in the U.S. This program reflects the USG's commitment to reaching out to diverse populations of Colombia. Ensuring follow on opportunities for the MLK fellows such as post-graduate studies, internships and job opportunities in Colombia is essential to the program's success.

NICHOLS